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# The Round Tablette

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## Welcome to the first April session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight's speaker is Lt. Col. (ret.) Dan Hampton, author of *Vanishing Act*, who will tell the story Plane #8 of the Doolittle Mission that landed in the Soviet Union after dropping its bombs in Japan. A special portion of the program will be how Minnesota played a role to the modifications of the Doolittle Raider's aircraft for the Mission

In the aftermath of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States suffered a string of losses. The Pacific island of Guam quickly fell on 10 December. Tiny Wake Island held out until 23 December. The death knell for the Philippines could be heard, even though it would not fall until May 1942. Supplying these American outposts proved to be a logistical nightmare. In January 1942 amidst so many defeats, US war planners began to plan a raid on the Japanese capital of Tokyo to hit industrial targets and exact a small measure of revenge.

This daring, nearly impossible, joint Army-Navy project called for bomber aircraft to take off from an aircraft carrier approximately 600 miles east of Tokyo. There was some discussion about which would be the better bomber to accomplish this task, the Martin B-26 Marauder, the Douglas B-23 Dragon, or the North American B-25 Mitchell. They finally decided that the B-25 seemed best suited for the task since the Dragon had too great a wingspan, and the B-26 had handling problems. The aircraft and crews came from the 17<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group which was fully equipped and familiar with B-25s. Lt. Col. James "Jimmy" Doolittle, the famous aviator and air speed champion, helped plan the raid and commanded the group. The aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* was chosen as the launch vessel. It was part of VADM William Halsey's Task Force 16 (TF-16) which would hopefully get the planes as close to the Japanese home islands as they could.

The Doolittle raid had a Minnesota connection. The B-25 Mitchell bombers were refit at the modification center of Mid-Continent Airlines in Minneapolis. Support was also provided by the senior airline managers at Wold-Chamberlain Field's maintenance hangar. The 710<sup>th</sup> Military Police

Battalion from Fort Snelling provided security. The modifications made in Minnesota included removing the lower gun turret, adding auxiliary fuel tanks, and replacing the Norden bombsight with a simpler version. All the modifications were done to reduce the weight of the planes. After being refitted, the planes were flown to Florida for bombing practice, simulated carrier take-offs, and over-water navigation. The 22 bombers were then flown cross country to meet up with TF-16.

The *Hornet* sailed from San Francisco Bay on 2 April with all 16 B-25s tied down on her deck and met up with TF-16 at sea north of Hawaii. On 17 April, after refueling from the oilers *Cimarron* and *Sabine*, the carriers and cruisers separated and steamed rapidly west, hoping to get within 400 miles of the Japanese home islands, a change in plans made after going to sea.

Early on 18 April, the force was sighted by the *Nittō Maru*, part of a screen of picket boats equipped with radios to give early warning of possible American bombers. The boat was destroyed by naval gunfire, but it had dispatched an attack warning. Doolittle and the *Hornet's* commander, Capt. Marc Mitscher, jointly decided to launch the strike 170 miles further out and hours earlier than planned. In groups of two to four aircraft, the bombers launched on their one-way flights just above the waves to avoid detection. Landing a B-25 on a carrier was a non-trivial, failure-prone event. The target cities were Tokyo, Yokosuka, Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagoya. The bombers did surprise the Japanese, but the damage was negligible. Even Lt. Gen. Claire Chennault, US commander in China, was not warned of the attack and no preparations were made to receive the bombers. As a result, all but one of the B-25s ditched at sea, crash-landed in China, or the crews bailed out, most surviving to either be captured or collected by the Chinese. The lone exception, Captain Edward "Ski" York's plane 8, landed in Vladivostok and the crew was interned by the Soviets (who were not at war with the Japanese) until they "appeared" at a British Consulate in Iraq on 11 May 1943 and returned home. Of the 80 men, 3 died, 8 were captured. Of these 8, 3 were executed and 1 died of disease. Eventually, 67 of the remaining 69 survivors returned to active service and 2 retired for disability.

While the actual damage was slight, the psychological effects on the Imperial Japanese General Staff (IJGS) proved profound. They

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If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

never conceived of the notion that the American forces could attack almost unimpeded from so far away. That the attacking bombers were land-based, which confused the IJGS because they could not conceive of launching B-25-sized planes off an aircraft carrier deck. As a result, the IJGS directed an attack on the Aleutian Islands since they could be land bases for bombers. In addition, they decided to attack Midway soon, to draw out the American aircraft carriers, in order to protect the home islands. The Battle of Midway proved even more disastrous for the Japanese.

Jimmy Doolittle believed that the mission was a failure and that he would be court-martialed upon his return to the United States. Instead, he was promoted to brigadier general and received the Medal of Honor. The crews that made it out of captivity were lavished with awards and then dispersed to other flight assignments around the world. One such Doolittle Raider, David “Davy” Jones, was shot down in the European Theater of Operations, became a POW in *Stalag Luft III* in Sagan and played a part in what has become known as “The Great Escape.”

Compared to the later bombings of the Japanese home islands by Boeing B-29 Superfortresses, the physical damage done by the Doolittle raid was minimal, but to a country still reeling from the attack on Pearl Harbor and the loss of territory to the surging Japanese empire, it provided an electric jolt to morale that soared with the news of the attack. Small though it was, it was the first victory in the war against the Empire of Japan.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

Dan Hampton, *Vanishing Act: The Enduring Mystery Behind the Legendary Doolittle Raid over Tokyo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2024).

Michel Paradis, *Last Mission to Tokyo* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

James M. Scott, *Target Tokyo: Jimmy Doolittle and the Raid that Avenged Pearl Harbor* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

James H. Doolittle, *I Could Never be So Lucky Again* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991ed, 2001).

Ted W. Lawson, *Thirty-Seconds over Tokyo* (New York: Ishi Press, 2001, ed. Originally published in 1943).

#### Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 19 May 2026–  
*Post-war Ordeals of Veterans*– [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) – e-mail: [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. 320-616-6050.

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall  
Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100.

<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org)

Friends of the National WW II Memorial –

<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org.US>

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association – [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net)

WWII Discussion Forum – [www.wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)

History Happy Hour - Sundays, 3 pm -

[www.historyhappyhour.com](http://www.historyhappyhour.com)

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -

[www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -

[jkyser45@gmail.com](mailto:jkyser45@gmail.com)

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

#### Round Table Schedule 2026

28 Apr. Mil. Intell. Japanese Lang. School

12 May Eisenhower’s Leadership

**The Round Table is a 501(c)3 nonprofit.**

**We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2HRT.**



Wold-Chamberlain Field, 1940 (MNHS)



Doolittle’s B-25B Mitchell bomber in Minneapolis circa 1942  
(Photo Tom Norrbohm in Historic Twin Cities)



B-25s tied down on USS *Hornet* Flight Deck (USN)



B-25 and AAA fire over Japan, 18 Apr.